

SB 70

DATE: Feb. 17, 2014

TO: Sen. Ed Meyer and Rep. Linda Gentile, Chairmen,
and Members of the Committee on the Environment

RE: Public Hearing on Senate Bill 70, "The Preservation
of Lands Under the Control of the Dept. of Energy
& Environmental Protection and the Dept. of Agriculture"

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is the statewide, non-profit coalition of river organizations, individuals, and businesses formed to protect and enhance Connecticut's waters by promoting sound water policies, uniting and strengthening the state's many river groups, and educating the public about the importance of water stewardship.

We and the undersigned write in strong support of Senate Bill 70. Rivers Alliance is one of several groups (including Audubon Connecticut, Connecticut Forest & Park Association, Connecticut Land Conservation Council, and Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter) that have been seeking effective protections for lands purchased by, or donated to, the state as open space for the enjoyment of the public and the preservation of natural resources. In the past 15 years, these public lands frequently have been the object of proposals to transfer title or and/or change use for purposes not compatible with conservation values. Occasionally, these efforts have been successful. More often, they have been turned aside, but at the expense of time and effort by public agencies, already stretched thin, and/or by members of the public, who understandably chafe at the need to fight for what is arguably already theirs.

Recent research has shown that state-owned lands, especially those in the Recreational and Natural Heritage Trust Program, have no legal protection, nothing in the land records, to prevent conveyance to another owner or for another use, including private development. Two years ago, Public Act 12-152 AAC The State's Open Space Plan called on DEEP to develop a strategy for preserving lands of high conservation value in perpetuity. Since then, numerous legal and logistic concerns have impeded progress. Senate Bill 70 makes explicit that the state has the right and the responsibility to protect, for the public, lands acquired and held for their high conservation value, including state forests and parks, wildlife management areas, and endangered habitats. Many of these properties contain or abut precious, high-quality waters.

We thank you for raising this bill, and urge you to pass it. We would be happy to answer question or help in any way. In an Appendix to this testimony, Rivers Alliance will address a few technical issues.

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Serving all the waters of Connecticut

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